

## CONSERVATION COMMISSION AND CONSERVATION DEPARTMENT

Fiscal Year 2009

The Amherst Conservation Commission was formed by a special act of the legislature and a vote of the Amherst Town Meeting and “.... *is the official agency specifically charged with the protection of a community’s natural resources.*” Our purpose is the “*promotion and development of natural resources...and protection of watershed resources.*” In this capacity, the Conservation Commission advises other municipal officials and boards on conservation issues, manages Town-owned land dedicated to conservation purposes, and has responsibility for administering the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act and Town Bylaw. Thus the Commission has management, education, and regulatory responsibilities in the Town of Amherst.

During FY 09, Commission members were: Briony Angus (chair), Dan Kaplan (vice-chair), John Gerber, Elisabeth Hamin, Harvey Allen, Todd Walker and Otto Stein. The commission works in close partnership with staff: Conservation and Development Director David Ziomek, Wetlands Administrator/Energy Task Force Coordinator Stephanie Ciccarello, Land Manager Doug Hutcheson, and Assistant Land Manager David McKinnon.

The Conservation Commission meets bi-monthly to discuss conservation issues and hold public hearings of the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act and the Town of Amherst Wetlands Protection Bylaw. In this capacity, we reviewed dozens of plans during the fiscal year from developers, individual homeowners, businesses, and public bodies for construction or other activities in the immediate vicinity of protected resource areas. Each new project of this sort requires a site visit and follow-up monitoring by either staff and/or Commission members. These public hearings allow continued development of Amherst’s homes and businesses while protecting critical natural resources such as wetlands, ponds and waterways. There has been a steady increase in the complexity and contentious nature of these hearings as Amherst becomes denser and building is proposed closer to vulnerable resource areas. Some activities in the proximity of protected resources result in violations and require immediate investigation, action, and often necessitate mitigation or restoration.

The commission heard the following number of hearings and or public meetings:  
Request for Determinations- 26; Notices of Intent- 7; Amended Notices of Intent- 3; Abbreviated Notices of Resource Area Delineation- 2; Emergency Certifications- 7; Enforcement Orders- 1.

Of those projects heard by the Commission, large-scale projects included; Atkins Corner; Lot 46 Hawthorn Road (multiple site visits and phone conversations); Strawberry Fields (Levi-Nielsen) – South East Street; DCR Rail Trail delineation (3 - 2+ hour site visits); Nunnelly Enforcement Order; and the Paige property – Potwine Lane (regarding the Deighton complaints which resulted in numerous communications and site visits).

The above list does not include general phone calls for information, drop-ins, inter-departmental communications and communication with state agencies that the Department handles on a daily basis.

In FY 09 the Commission and Department worked collaboratively on the following:

- Preservation of the Tietjen land in South Amherst (30-acre APR/17-acre gift);
- Preservation of the Johnson land in South Amherst (15-acre Conservation Restriction);
- Completion of the 5-Year Update to the Open Space and Recreation Plan;
- Support for the Hitchcock Center's Green Building Project;
- Formation of the Puffer's Pond 2020 Sub Committee;
- Many community events related to the 250<sup>th</sup> Celebration of Amherst;
- Submittal of various grants for urban forestry, energy efficiency, land conservation, trail improvements and water quality assessment/improvement;
- Support of the Public Shade Tree Committee; and
- Beaver management throughout Town.

The Director of Conservation and Development also played a critical role in the reorganization of the offices of Conservation, Planning, Zoning, Inspection Services and Community Development.

The Town of Amherst has demonstrated a long-term commitment to conservation issues related to sustaining farming, supporting wildlife habitat, and maintenance of natural areas. Without this support, neither the Conservation Department nor the Commission would be effective in the long run. Of particular concern to the Conservation Commission is the continued financial support authorized by the Town Meeting each year. We believe that the public investment in developing conservation resources over the past 30 years is worthy of continued support as these resources do so much to define the character of our Town.

Each year the Conservation Department works collaboratively with citizens, Town departments and numerous state agencies to protect and enhance the natural environment in Amherst.

The Conservation Department oversees the management of over 2000 acres of public conservation land and 80+ miles of public trails. In addition, the Department has assisted the Town in acquiring another 2000 acres of Agricultural Preservation Restrictions, thus preserving farmland in perpetuity, and protected 150 acres that are currently in Conservation Restrictions. Other activities of the Department include: 1) trail maintenance, 2) invasive species awareness and control, 3) beaver habitat management on Town lands, 4) supervision of activities at Puffers Pond, 4) maintenance of natural resource signage, 5) encouragement of farming, 6) awareness and protection of endangered species, 7) encouragement of nature and outdoor education, 8) environmental protection, 9) coordination of conservation efforts with other departments and committees, and 10) coordination of conservation efforts with neighboring towns.

The Conservation Department provides direct and indirect support and assistance to the following boards committees:

1) Conservation Commission; 2) Agricultural Commission; 3) Public Shade Tree Committee; 3) Amherst Energy Task Force; 4) Public Transportation Committee/Bicycling Committee; 5) Planning Board; 6) Zoning Board of Appeals; 7) Norwottuck Rail Trail Advisory Committee; 8) Board of Health; 9) Leisure Services & Supplemental Education Commission; 9) Puffer's Pond 2020.